Introduction: the differentiated politicisation of European governance

de Wilde, Pieter ; Leupold, Anna ; Schmidtke, Henning

Abstract: The politicisation of European governance has become an important subject in debates about the institutional design, day-to-day decision-making and democratic legitimacy of the European Union. This special issue takes stock of this development of politicisation research, including the theoretical development as well as the rapidly expanding body of empirical evidence. It synergises the various perspectives on politicisation of European governance, building on a common understanding of politicisation as a three-dimensional process involving increasing salience, polarisation of opinion and the expansion of actors and audiences involved in EU issues. The introduction outlines the central theoretical and conceptual questions concerning the politicisation of European governance and provides a guiding framework for the contributions to this special issue. The contributions document that a differentiated Europe leads to differentiated politicisation across times, countries and settings. The differentiated patterns, particularly across countries, present profound challenges to the future trajectory of European integration and its democratic legitimacy.

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Introduction: The Differentiated Politicisation of European Governance

Pieter de Wilde
WZB Berlin Social Science Center
Reichpietschufer 50
10785 Berlin
Germany
Email: pieter.dewilde@wzb.eu
Tel: +49 30 25491 191

Anna Leupold
(corresponding author)
University of Zurich
Andreasstr. 15
8050 Zurich
Switzerland
Email: a.leupold@ipmz.uzh.ch
Tel.: +41 (0)44 634 46 95

Henning Schmidtke
School of Economic and Political Science
University of St. Gallen
Rosenbergstrasse 51
9000 St. Gallen
Switzerland
Phone: +41 71 224 23 52
henning.schmidtke@unisg.ch

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Pieter de Wilde is Senior Researcher in the Department of Global Governance, WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Germany. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of Oslo. Pieter's research focuses on patterns of politicisation in the EU and in wider globalisation contexts with a specific focus on media and parliamentary debates. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy* and *Journal of European Integration* amongst others.

Anna Leupold is a Senior Research and Teaching Assistant at the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research at the University of Zurich. She holds a PhD in political science from the Freie Universität Berlin. Her research focuses on the politicisation of European governance, the European public sphere and the meaning of the public sphere for societal integration and cohesion.

Henning Schmidtke, is a Senior Researcher at the University of St Gallen and part of the Emmy Noether Research Group 'Changing Norms of Global Governance'. His research interests include the formation, design, and behaviour of international organisations, their modes of governance and the contentious politics around them. Is work has appeared *German Policy Studies*, *Leviathan* and *Review of International Studies*.

The politicisation of European governance has become an important subject in debates about the institutional design, day-to-day decision-making and democratic legitimacy of the European Union (EU). This Special Issue takes stock of this development of politicisation research, including the theoretical development as well as the rapidly expanding body of empirical evidence. It synergises the various perspectives on politicisation of European governance, building on a common understanding of politicisation as a three-dimensional process involving increasing salience, polarisation of opinion and the expansion of actors and audiences involved in EU issues. The introduction outlines the central theoretical and conceptual questions concerning the politicisation of European governance and provides a guiding framework for the contributions to this Special Issue. The contributions document that a differentiated Europe leads to differentiated politicisation across times, countries and settings. The differentiated patterns, particularly across countries, present profound challenges to the future trajectory of European integration and its democratic legitimacy.

Key words: European Integration, European Union, Governance, Politicisation

The 2017 referendum on United Kingdom (UK) membership of the European Union (EU) and its central role in the 2015 UK general elections (Startin 2015) testifies to five fundamental characteristics of European integration and politics within its member states: *First*, questions related to European governance generate fundamental controversy among EU citizens, in media debates and in party political competition (Marks and Steenbergen 2004; Risse 2015). *Second*, these questions concern both constitutional issues, such as whether a particular country wants to be a member of the EU and what powers EU institutions should have, and more specific policy questions, like the right to free movement within the Schengen area. *Third*, the degree and nature of this controversy vary across time, space and settings as other member states do not feature such a referendum, and it is the first referendum on the EU within the UK since 1975 (Hobolt 2009; Hutter and Grande 2014). Many argue that the political climate in which European integration unfolds since the early 1990s can no longer be characterised as a 'permissive consensus' in which citizens allow elites to shape the nature, direction and speed of integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Risse 2015). Others challenge whether there really is a fundamental break with the period before the 1990s (Hutter and Grande 2014; Schrag Sternberg 2013). *Fourth*, while referenda obviously function as a catalyst for paramount and manifest controversy, deeper causes account for the more enduring and widespread existence of this controversy (De Wilde and Zürn 2012; Statham and Trenz 2015). *Fifth*, the prospect of such tests of public legitimacy of the EU drives a renegotiation of the terms of European integration and the outcome of these tests carry profound consequences for the EU (Rauh 2012; Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2015).

This special issue sets out to investigate the process of 'politicisation' of European governance (De Wilde 2011; De Wilde and Zürn 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Statham and Trenz 2013). Different understandings exist of what exactly politicisation entails, somewhat dependent on the disciplinary background of scholarship, dominated by comparative politics, political sociology, international relations, public administration and communication science.

Furthermore, what is understood as politicisation depends on the empirical focus of study. An emphasis on party politics, public opinion or mass media coverage, and the use of the respective data sources leads to slightly different understandings of politicisation (for an overview, see De Wilde 2011). Still, a convergence in recent years is noticeable. Most students of politicisation refer to a component of importance (societal actors consider EU issues more important for their interests or values), a behavioural component (societal actors spend more resources on contesting or influencing EU issues), a preference component (opinions diverge about what the EU should be and do) and a socialisation component (more societal actors become attentive and/or engaged in EU affairs). While these components show up in many studies of politicisation, the way they are labelled, conceptualised and aggregated varies depending on the focus of the study at hand.

We condense these components into a three-dimensional concept to facilitate the analysis of politicisation in a wide variety of settings. We posit that politicisation can be empirically observed in (a) the growing *salience* of European governance, involving (b) a *polarisation of opinion*, and (c) an *expansion of actors and audiences* engaged in monitoring EU affairs (cf. De Wilde 2011; De Wilde and Zürn 2012; Green-Pedersen 2012; Hutter and Grande 2014; Statham and Trenz 2013; Zürn *et al.* 2012). The latter dimension especially directs most studies of politicisation to the public sphere as the infrastructure through which more actors and audiences become involved in European governance. In fact, whereas European integration was invariably contested among executive politicians and bureaucrats, the changes brought about by politicisation are unthinkable without the broader resonance of EU issues in the public sphere.

The contributions to this volume start out from this three-dimensional understanding of politicisation. This allows us to address three specific sets of questions in a detailed fashion. First, we ask a descriptive question: Is there just one pattern of politicisation of which there can be 'more' or 'less', 'increasing' or 'decreasing', or are we rather confronted with

differentiated politicisation? More specifically, we ask how and to what extent does the politicisation of European governance manifest itself empirically? That is, how salient and polarised is European governance? How many and which individual and collective actors are involved in EU affairs? And, in which settings can we locate politicisation?

Second, we ask how the observed variance of different patterns of politicisation can be explained. Is there a single underlying cause of politicisation, which translates into different patterns due to varying contextual conditions? Or do different settings, times and locations feature a plurality of causes? The hypothesis that the increasing authority of the EU fuels politicisation would predict the first. An explanatory focus on elite cueing, identity or contestation driven by economic interests points to variations in patterns of politicisation.

Finally, we turn to the still largely unexplored normative and empirical consequences of politicisation. Do different patterns of politicisation empower some actors over others? Do they affect the course of the integration process towards more or less sovereignty transfer and/or membership enlargement (see Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2015 for a recent contribution to this research agenda)? Does politicisation enhance the democratic quality of European governance or does it inhibit the efficiency of supranational decision-making?

Dimensions of Variation in Politicisation

European integration was long perceived to be the prerogative of state executives, bureaucrats and lawyers. The permissive consensus narrative argued that major initial decisions that set the process of integration into motion were taken in closed circles, outside the spotlight of public scrutiny. The vast majority of citizens did not care about European integration, and to the limited extent that they did, they provided latent support (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). In fact, the historical trajectory of European integration is more complex. A first episode of politicisation could already be observed in 1954 during the failed ratification of the European Defence Community in the French parliament. Long-term analyses by Grande and Hutter

(2016), Hoeglinger (2016) and Schmidtke (2016) demonstrate that the politicisation of European governance is not an entirely new feature of the post-Maastricht period. Rather, it appears to follow more cyclical trajectories, which have intensified considerably over the past decades.

These cycles can also be traced in the scholarly literature explaining the logics of European integration. Early thinkers, such as Haas (2004) and Schmitter (1969) considered politicisation an important force. Yet, many of their neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist successors (Hoffmann 1964; Milward 2000; Moravcsik 1998) did not ascribe a major influence to societal actors, like political parties, mass media or citizens. More recently, Schmitter's (1969: 166) expectation that one day in the future, the '*controversality* of joint decision making' would rise and in turn lead to '*a widening of the audience or clientèle* interested and active in integration' (italics in original), enjoys a growing scholarly popularity. The concept and its three core dimensions of *salience*, *polarisation* and *expansion of actors and audiences* have regained attention the latest after the rejection of the constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005. Reviewing the early literature, De Wilde (2011: 560) highlights the public sphere as the primary locus of politicisation and defines politicisation as 'an increase in polarisation of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU'. This understanding implies that a multitude of actors engages with issues of European governance via direct participation, public debate or protest. These manifestations of actor engagement are time and place specific. They result in different patterns of politicisation with respect to the relative strength of salience and polarisation in various settings, the specific constellation of actors and audiences, the behavioural manifestations of politicisation and its substantive content (see also De Wilde and Zürn 2012; Hurrelmann *et al.* 2013).

Yet, contrary to Schmitter's expectation that the higher salience of European integration would lead to more support, recent politicisation research has shown that

increasing salience does not result in invariable support for European governance (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). Rising levels of Euroscepticism, as manifested in the electoral success of populist right-wing parties, and mounting public criticism uttered by a growing set of actors indicate that politicisation is driven primarily by those critical of the integration process rather than by those who are supportive.

To address these controversial expectations and empirical observations, the contributions to this volume build on the multidimensional concept of politicisation. We understand *salience* as the importance attributed to the EU and European integration. It may be indicated by the amount of newspaper articles reporting on European governance (e.g. Grande and Hutter 2016; Hoeglinger 2016; Leupold 2016; Schmidtke 2016), how 'aware' citizens are of the existence of the EU, its institutions and policies and how worried they are about EU politics, (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016), by the amount of public statements party representatives dedicate to EU issues in national election campaigns (Hoeglinger 2016) or by the number of parliamentary questions devoted to EU issues (Wonka 2016).

Polarisation signifies an occupation of more extreme positions – either in favour of or against different aspects of EU governance – and/or a depletion of neutral, ambivalent or indifferent attitudes. The ultimate polarised scenario would feature diametrically opposed coalitions of societal groups at extreme positions with neutral voices having been crowded out. In politicisation research, polarisation has been often operationalised as polarisation of a country's party system (Kriesi *et al.* 2012: 113; Kriesi *et al.* 2008: 364). More recently, the concept is also increasingly used as an indicator for the positions of other agents of politicisation and in measuring disagreement about European governance in public opinion surveys (Van Ingelgom 2014).

Finally, *actor and audience expansion* captures the growing number of citizens and collective actors who dedicate resources in the form of time and money to follow and engage with EU governance. In the mass media, this largely takes the shape of *actor* expansion of

predominantly elite and collective actors (Hutter and Grande 2014) since those who engage with EU governance must actively communicate to make it to the news. However, online and social media are increasingly dominated by direct citizens' voice (De Wilde *et al.* 2014). Among citizens, *audience* expansion may take more passive forms. Here, increasing public resonance in the form of the amount of citizens regularly following EU events and the respective news signifies politicisation. One way in which audience expansion may manifest is in the traveling of debate from one setting to the next; for instance from parliamentary plenaries to newspaper coverage to social media.

In our understanding, all three elements listed above need to be present for politicisation. Thus, the contributions to this special issue investigate the salience, polarisation and expansion of actors and audiences surrounding EU governance over time, across space and in different settings, even if differences remain about empirical indicators and the relative importance of these dimensions.

Settings

Patterns of politicisation as well as developments over time are crucially dependent on the settings, in which politicisation takes place (De Wilde 2014: 6; Kriesi *et al.* 2012). Settings constitute frameworks or environments, in which politicisation becomes publicly manifest. We distinguish between three central political settings as particularly important to politicisation: *parliaments (mostly mass mediated), public spheres* and *public opinion*. The main focus of this volume is on domestic arenas. While a growing literature argues that a stronger politicisation of the European Parliament (EP) and the respective elections might help to alleviate the EU's alleged democratic deficit (Follesdal and Hix 2006; Hix 2008; Mair 2007; Statham and Trenz 2015), transnational politicisation remains relatively week. Even Euro crisis protest events have remained largely confined to national borders (Pianta 2013: 157) and EP elections are still of secondary importance to voters (Clark and Rohrschneider

2009; Hobolt and Spoon 2012). In line with these findings, the politicisation of European governance proceeds mainly in nationally segmented publics instead of a transnationally integrated settings (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014b; Risse 2010; but see Risse 2015 for a more optimistic perspective on future developments). The main reasons for this segmentation seem to be structural barriers, such as nationally structured media systems (Wessler *et al.* 2008).

National parliaments are often considered to be at the core of the European polity, understood as a system of institutions linked through relationships of delegation and accountability and based on the principles of representative democracy (Lord and Pollak 2010). Recent studies of politicisation in parliamentary debates show that European governance is indeed becoming more salient and controversial among parliamentarians (Closa and Maatsch 2014; Rauh 2015; Wendler 2014). In many national parliaments, the era of the permissive consensus – if it ever fully existed – is over and they aim to play a more crucial role in European politics not only since the Euro crisis. Although parliaments' engagement with European governance remains selective and is conditioned by institutional factors, issue salience and party politics, there seems to be a more general politicisation trend (Auel and Christiansen 2015). Wonka (2016) illustrates this development for the German *Bundestag* during the Euro crisis.

With its key interlinking function between politicians and citizens, the *(mass mediated) public sphere* connects political decision-making processes to preference formation, articulation and aggregation among the citizenry (Koopmans and Statham 2010: 54). Populated by journalists, party representatives, interest groups and an increasing number of non-professionals interested in European governance, this setting constitutes a transmission belt between European institutions and citizens (Castells 2008: 78; Habermas 1996: 360; Pfetsch *et al.* 2010). Respective research shows that a broad variety of actors voices positions on European governance in the mass media. This setting is thus often considered to play a

crucial role in the politicisation process (Kleinen-von Königslöw 2012; Koopmans and Statham 2010; Kriesi *et al.* 2012; Risse 2010; Statham and Trenz 2013, 2015). The majority of the contributions to this volume draw on mass media data to study politicisation, albeit for different reasons: While some consider mass media as the primary setting of democratic politics due to its communicative and connecting functions (De Wilde and Lord 2016; Leupold 2016), others consider it a data source for the analysis of politicisation more generally (Grande and Hutter 2016; Hoeglinger 2016; Schmidtke 2016).

The contributions to this special issue indicate considerable variance of the politicisation patterns of European governance in media debates: Schmidtke provides evidence in support of a growing politicisation of European Governance in mass media over time. The study by Grande and Hutter shows that country-specific levels of politicisation are largely shaped by political events related to authority transfer to the EU, such as the question of EU membership or whether a referendum is held. Yet, Hoeglinger warns against an overestimation of the level of politicisation. His analysis demonstrates that national election campaigns are still dominated by other issues than European governance (see also Kriesi *et al.* 2012). While media debates about European governance may be generally on the rise, attention strongly fluctuates in cycles, differs across countries and often lags behind other issues.

These findings are underlined with a view to the politicisation of European governance among European *citizens* in Baglioni and Hurrelmann's (2016) study of laypeople – a perspective largely understudied in the current literature (but see Stoeckel 2013; Van Ingelgom 2014). While parliamentarians and actors present in mass media seem to have picked up European governance as a controversial issue, citizens do not appear to follow this development swiftly. Drawing on survey and protest data as well as focus group interviews, the authors demonstrate that the mobilisation of individual citizens to engage with European governance is still considerably lower than the politicisation literature suggests for

parliaments and mass media. Overall, the contributions show that there is no universal pattern and no simple linear trend of politicisation. Rather, we are confronted with a differentiated politicisation of European governance, in which patterns vary substantially across settings and time.

Objects

In a well-cited article, Mair (2007) differentiates between different forms of opposition to the EU, which in turn have varying implications for the EU's empirical legitimacy (for related arguments about global governance, see Zürn and Ecker-Ehrhardt 2013). While opposition to individual policies is constitutive of the democratic process (Norris 1999), opposition to the polity questions the legitimacy of a political system (Easton 1965). Mair's main contention is that the European polity hardly allows for opposition to policies due to the weak accountability of key decision-makers in the European Commission and the European Council, which are relatively shielded from public scrutiny. Lacking the opportunity to 'throw the rascals out,' critical parliamentarians, interest groups and citizens redirect their discontent toward the polity itself. Mair's argument implies that the lack of electoral accountability directly fuels a specific pattern of politicisation, which denounces the European polity as the *object* of politicisation.

The current literature on the politicisation of European governance, however, rarely distinguishes between different objects of politicisation and can thus only provide limited insights into the consequences of politicisation. Only if we know whether conflict is organised around the legitimacy of the Union itself or around day-to-day EU decision-making, does it become possible to gauge the effects of politicisation. The contributions to this volume reveal that politicisation objects vary substantially across settings: Baglioni and Hurrelmann (2016) and Hoeglinger (2016) show that citizens as well as parties in electoral campaigns focus mainly on the polity as politicisation object. For these settings, Mair might be right because

politicisation appears to be mainly organised in terms of principled opposition to or support for the EU as a whole.

Yet, parliamentary debates do not solely address the legitimacy of the European polity. Wonka (2016) shows that the European measures to tackle the financial crisis became a major object of politicisation in the German parliament. Similarly, Wendler's (2014: 563) comparative analysis of parliamentary debates demonstrates that constitutive issues of EU Treaty reform are quickly linked to redistributive concerns. Admittedly, the empirical distinction between policy and polity as objects of politicisation is sometimes hard to make, either because agents of politicisation underspecify what they support or oppose, or because the EU has constitutionalised certain policies. The Economic and Monetary Union is a case in point, in which macroeconomic policies have been constitutionalised in the Stability and Growth Pact. Grande's and Hutter's (2016) analysis of different types of polity politicisation shows that matters are even more complicated. The authors demonstrate that public debates about Treaty revision and the respective empowerment of EU institutions, one's home country's membership and the accession of other countries vary strongly. They find that the issue of membership generates much more politicisation then Treaty revision or accession.

Unpacking EU policies Leupold (2016) and Schmidtke (2016) analyse issue-specific politicisation processes. They show that mass media do not only feature controversy over the European polity but that, under specific conditions, EU day-to-day policy-making and policies also become objects of politicisation. It thus seems that concerns about the polity are particularly dominant among citizens, whereas both parliamentary debate and mass media coverage feature a broader array of politicisation objects.

In sum, the empirical analyses presented in this volume demonstrate that the politicisation of European governance is more differentiated than the current literature expects. Neither is politicisation equal to the rising prominence of Euroscepticism or unconditional support, nor are patterns of politicisation stable across settings. Politicisation

among citizens appears to be much weaker than in mass media and parliaments, and to focus more on the EU polity than on day-to-day policy-making.

Drivers of Politicisation and Conditions of Variance

Following Schmitter's (1969) initial theorising, De Wilde and Zürn (2012) argue that the politicisation of European governance is here to stay as long as its driving force – the increasing authority of the EU itself – remains in place. This *authority transfer hypothesis* is based on two assumptions: First, citizens and collective political actors are expected to care about who decides about their living conditions. Second, they are assumed to be capable of identifying the political institutions that make important decisions for them. Accordingly, they direct their demands and objections to these institutions. The contributions to this volume demonstrate that the authority transfer hypothesis needs modification: Patterns of authority transfer and politicisation only match to a limited extend. EU authority has steadily increased over time and has become particularly strong in the core member states that are full members of the Eurozone, Schengen, the Area of Freedom and Justice and EU foreign policy (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014a; Leuffen *et al.* 2013). Yet, we do not observe a steady increase of politicisation over time and politicisation levels vary by country and integration step. At the same time, we document that the authority of the EU is one of the dominant objects of politicisation. Of utmost concern is the question of membership: shall we be a member of the EU and/or the Eurozone mobilises people much more than treaty revisions or the accession of other countries (Grande and Hutter 2016). Yet, we also demonstrate that the day-to-day exercise of formal authority spurs politicisation (Leupold 2016; Schmidtke 2016; Wonka 2016).

Overall, these results indicate that the explanatory power of intermediating variables should not be underestimated. Authority transfer does not automatically translate into uniform patterns of politicisation in all EU member states. To understand the differentiated patterns of

politicisation, we need to consider the interactive relationship between authority transfer and country-specific relationships with the EU, different political and economic systems and different opportunities in the form of elections and referenda.

The *strategic competition hypothesis* argues that politicisation is largely driven by strategically competing party officials (Sitter 2008; Taggart 1998). Our contributions, however, find only limited support for this argument. Although empirical studies show that political parties are indeed central actors in shaping politicisation patterns and that public opinion is moulded through cuing by elites in top-down direction (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Steenbergen *et al.* 2007), parties operate less strategically than expected. Rather, Hoeglinger's (2016) contribution highlights that political parties competing for office tend to shy away from strong EU politicisation as the complex nature of European integration does not allow for simple position-taking irrespective of party ideology.

In support of the *cleavage transformation hypothesis* (Hooghe *et al.* 2004; Kriesi *et al.* 2012; Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Marks and Wilson 2000), we show in different contexts that party competition is constrained by ideology (Hoeglinger 2016; Schmidtke 2016; Wonka 2016). These ideational preferences of constituencies are considered to be shaped by macro processes like globalisation and migration (Kriesi *et al.* 2012; Kriesi *et al.* 2008), dominant policies enacted by the EU, i.e. neoliberal market-making up until the early 1990s and subsequent market regulation (Hooghe *et al.* 2004).

Additionally, the *institutional misfit hypothesis* (cf. Börzel and Risse 2000) argues that the greater the discrepancy between the national economic and political system and the EU system, the higher the potential for politicisation (Brinegar *et al.* 2004). Leupold (2016) presents new evidence supporting this hypothesis, albeit qualifying the mechanism how politicisation plays out under the condition of institutional misfit in the public sphere. Given that the EU affects a range of different national policies, countries suffering from high institutional misfit, which consequently strive to alter European rules, are more likely to use

inside-lobbying strategies that are more sensitive diplomatically. As a result, the level of publicly visible EU politicisation is higher in countries with a good institutional fit, which tend to defend the status quo.

Finally, the *proxy hypothesis* states that EU citizens use other criteria of assessment to form their opinions about the EU. Kritzinger (2003: 321) analyses public support for European integration in relation to individuals' assessment of national political and economic performance. She finds that '[c]itizens use domestic realities as proxies for their attitudes towards the EU' (Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Rohrschneider and Loveless 2010). In some countries, a negative assessment of national politics is associated with a positive attitude towards European integration because citizens see the EU as a lifebuoy to protect them from the incompetence of national politicians (Munoz *et al.* 2011). In Germany and Italy, for example, citizens who dislike national politics because of corruption or historical militarism have a positive attitude towards European integration. In contrast, French and British citizens become more positive towards European integration as their assessment of national economic performance improves (Kritzinger 2003). To them, the EU is an extension of the nation-state, not an alternative. Baglioni and Hurrelmann (2016) address the question of citizens' attribution of responsibility in the Euro crisis. Their findings imply that the EU is not considered responsible for the crisis. Rather, citizens still address their demands to the national level. Overall, findings on the proxy hypothesis so far rebut a simple blame-shifting mechanism from the national level to the EU (Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Nullmeier *et al.* 2014: 197-218).

The contributions to the special issue show that differentiated politicisation results from a complex interaction of different types of authority transfer and a set of context conditions. The relationship between authority transfer and politicisation is not a static one between cause and effect. Rather, patterns of politicisation are shaped substantially by country-specific institutional, economic and cultural conditions. These context-specific

factors often carry greater explanatory powers than the underlying fundamental authority transfer.

Consequences

The proposition that European governance has become politicised is accepted widely in the recent literature and supported by an increasing wealth of empirical evidence (but see Hoeglinger 2016 for a sceptical perspective). In contrast, the academic debate about the consequences of politicisation remains shaped by theory-driven controversies and dependent on assumptions about the nature of the EU. On the one hand, we find the neofunctionalist expectation that politicisation leads to more authority transfer (Schmitter 1969). On the other hand, we find the postfunctionalist argument that politicisation constitutes a brake on integration. Because citizens are less supportive of integration than elites politicisation reduces the possibilities for state executives to reach compromises in the EU framework (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Recent studies on the Euro crisis take a third perspective, arguing that politicisation takes the critical connotation expected by postfunctionalists, but has little constraining effect on the integration process (Schimmelfennig 2014).

The normative debate about the effects of politicisation on democratic legitimacy centres on the ontological nature of the EU. Those who see the EU as an instrument in the hands of sovereign nation-states – a typical international organisation – argue the EU does not need to be democratic, as democratic legitimacy is safeguarded at the national level (Moravcsik 2006). Politicisation would be detrimental from this perspective, because it could jeopardise Pareto-optimal regulatory solutions (Majone 1998).

By contrast, those arguing that the EU is a polity in the making, tend to argue that standards of democratic legitimacy should apply, and identify a democratic deficit (Eriksen 2009; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2007; Lord 1998; Risse 2010). Habermasians and competitive elitists share an understanding of politicisation as beneficial to EU democracy,

albeit for different reasons. The Habermasians understand more public debate as a precondition for democratic collective will-formation and for holding those in power to account (Rauh and Zürn 2014; Risse 2015; Statham and Trenz 2015). Elitists rather focus on the articulation of conflict, and its pressure on partisan elites to take a stance on Europe to offer voters a meaningful choice during elections (Follesdal and Hix 2006; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Finally, consociationalists warn about the centrifugal effects of conflict in heterogeneous polities like the EU whose stability relies on the capacity of elites to make compromises behind closed doors (Bartolini 2006; Papadopoulos and Magnette 2010). As politicisation makes such compromises more difficult, if not impossible, it could ultimately tear the Union apart.

Linked to this normative debate is the question of how European integration affects democracy at the national level. Pessimists argue that European integration has negative effects on national democracy, because fundamental political decisions can no longer be made at the place where debate and political conflict about them occur (Dahl 1999). Thus, Schmidt (2006) states that democracy requires 'politics' (debate, conflict and choice) to decide which 'policies' (legislative output) to implement. The empowerment of the EU without the creation of democratic pan-European debate, however, has yielded 'politics without policy' at the national level and 'policy without politics' at the European level. That is, we debate and contest what should be done at the national level but national politicians are increasingly powerless to implement the results of these debates. At the same time, important policy decisions are made at the European level without the necessary debate. Hence, a dual or multilevel democratic deficit is created. Without a meaningful choice about policies at the national level, voters increasingly direct their frustration toward the polity (Mair 2007). By bringing polity contestation to the national level, politicisation reduces the democratic deficit of 'policy without politics' to 'politics about polity'.

The second perspective portrays international organisations as democracy enhancing. They help countries to overcome coordination problems caused by interdependence – a state of affairs that makes effective national policy-formulation increasingly impossible (Keohane 2011; Keohane *et al.* 2009). The EU is thus regarded as a means to re-establish effective policy-formulation. Through this lens, the extent to which politicisation makes it more difficult to engage in collective policy-formulation within the EU reduces democratic legitimacy at the national level because important societal problems with an international dimension can no longer be effectively addressed.

De Wilde and Lord (2016) develop a differentiated view on the consequences of politicisation taking into account the conceptualisation and measurements of politicisation. They argue that the way polarisation pits one group against another – along international or domestic conflict lines – affects the democratic legitimacy of the EU in different ways. International polarisation, as we have seen in the Euro crisis debates, carries great potential for raising awareness and mobilising Europe's citizens. Yet, it hinders democratic preference aggregation because deliberation across borders is limited and electoral competition non-existent. Domestic polarisation may stimulate democratic legitimacy at the national level, but limits it at the European level, if it does not manifest in all member states equally. The contributions by Baglioni and Hurrelmann (2016) and Leupold (2016), moreover, highlight that the dominant focus on conflicting national demands results in an empowerment of national political institutions, particularly national governments. This could result in a more pronounced intergovernmental nature of the EU.

Conclusion

The contributions to this special issue provide an overview of politicisation research in the national context and novel insights into the causes and consequence of the differentiated politicisation of European governance. Going beyond the current literature, the contributions

disaggregate and examine politicisation processes among different sets of actors and on different objects. They highlight the explanatory power of intermediating factors, like the institutional surrounding and country-specific economic and cultural conditions in which politicisation unfolds.

Sharing a similar definition of politicisation, the authors draw on different data sources over a time span between 1970 and today and employ quantitative and qualitative methods leading to a differentiated picture of politicisation patterns across small and large countries, founding members and accession countries, and the non-member Switzerland. The volume includes contributions by Wonka on the interaction between parliament and mass media; Grande and Hutter, Hoeglinger, Leupold, and Schmidtke on polity and policy debates and its causes in mass media and party politics; Baglioni and Hurrelmann on public opinion; and De Wilde and Lord on the consequences of different patterns of politicisation for the democratic quality of European decision-making.

Taken together, the findings imply that the idea of 'the politicisation of European governance' in the singular is untenable to maintain. Rather, we face differentiated forms, degrees and manifestations of politicisation depending on the time, setting and location in which it unfolds. One result EU institutions or EU member states collectively have a hard time responding to the demands voiced in the process of politicisation. Different 'Europes' are demanded by different people, in different settings, different countries and even by the same people at different times. The special issue thus implies that future research should focus more strongly on some key intermediating variables, which shape politicisation on the ground.

One such variable is a country's influence on EU politics. The more a nation perceives itself as capable of shaping and steering EU governance, the more likely it is to politicise other questions than just membership. A perception of choice and the sense of political efficacy is both an essential precondition for politicisation and subsequently strengthened by

it. A nation that perceives itself as powerless in EU governance, is unlikely to feature politicisation save for the ultimate question of membership. Politicisation of a left-right nature, in which a policy choice between individual freedom, collective equality or solidarity is presented, is therefore most likely in the big member states of core Europe, such as France and Germany. By contrast, small peripheral countries are less likely to feature the left-right contestation over EU policies. These countries rather feature conflicts over the EU polity and membership (Leupold 2016). The fact that countries like Switzerland have not participated as full members in EU governance, exactly because the authority of the EU is such a controversial and mobilising issue domestically, should be seen in this context. Politicisation is not necessarily the result of authority transfer, but may well be the reason why it did not happen (Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2015). The contributions to this volume strongly suggest a more nuanced testing of the authority transfer hypothesis using dynamic research designs in which both authority transfers in the past as well as plans for prospective transfers in the future can affect politicisation in the present.

Another key intermediating factor is the extent and nature of issue linkages with European affairs, in particular with immigration (Hoeglinger 2016). If those who contest migration are the same as those who contest European governance and they do so in similar ways, the politicisation of European governance is likely to 'survive' as long as migration is a contested issue in European societies. However, this linkage begs more research on the politicisation of European governance on migration. So far, little empirical knowledge exists on public debates, public opinion and party politics about Frontex, Fortress Europe, European labour mobility or Lampedusa and the European Blue Card. If the hypothesis about a growing globalisation cleavage is correct, few aspects of European governance should have the same mobilising potential as European migration policy. More generally, the effects of issue linkages and the emergence of a globalisation cleavage predict a long-term growth of politicisation. Building on the results of this volume, we expect this general trend to be

characterised by short-term issue attention cycles. Peaks and valleys are likely to be shaped by the political agenda of the time and place in question, and the relative salience of migration and European governance on that agenda.

While research in the 1990s and early 2000s has made a strong case that identity is a core factor shaping citizens' views on European integration, the Euro crisis appears to re-link European integration to major macroeconomic factors and wealth distribution both within and between EU member states. Statham and Trenz (2013) have already hypothesised the returned primacy of economic interests in explaining the politicisation of European governance. Our analyses – particularly Leupold (2016) and Wonka (2016) – support this claim. Yet, even in clearly economic issue areas, like taxation, identity and cultural considerations continue to shape politicisation patterns (Schmidtke 2016). European issues are thus unlikely to become completely decoupled from 'cultural' issues, like migration. Hoeglinger's (2016) findings illustrate this entanglement of economic and cultural issues. The extent to which issues of European integration are linked to economic and cultural concerns and the conditions that shape these linkages, such as the Euro crisis, are thus still open to future research.

Finally, more research is needed on the framing of EU governance during politicisation processes (for an early study see Diez Medrano 2003). Framing Europe in different ways does not directly imply 'more' or 'less' politicisation. Frames are therefore not part of the three core components of politicisation. However, processes of sense-making and framing are likely to impact the nature of politicisation. They may well facilitate or inhibit politicisation and carry implications for the consequences of politicisation. The contributions focusing on the Euro crisis show, for instance, that the intergovernmental framing of the EU during the crisis empowers national governments over opposition parties and European actors (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016; Leupold 2016; Wonka 2016).

We have argued that our focused conceptual and analytical approach to politicisation building on comparative research designs has the capacity to unveil differentiated patterns of

politicisation across time and space. However, in his concluding commentary Zürn (2016) points out that a broader understanding of politicisation processes may be inhibited as long as we do not open up the perspective in two important ways: First, more can be learned by comparing of the current politicisation of EU governance and the politicisation processes that shaped modern nation-states. Second, the analysis of the politicisation of a broader set of international organisations beyond the EU should yield more generalizable and robust results on the explanatory value of variables discussed in this volume (Zürn *et al.* 2012). Zürn also raises the question of whether our understanding of politicisation is too narrow. What we understand to be politicisation of European governance may provide the framework for a targeted and enriching line of research, but we ought to critically reflect on its embeddedness within broader social processes and institutional developments.

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